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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

DESCARTES' ARGUMENT FOR CERTAINTY: THE ROLE OF CLEAR AND DISTINCT PERCEPTION

by

© BILLIE ANN PELLETIER

A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Descartes' Argument for Certainty: The Role of Clear and Distinct Perception submitted by Billie Ann Pelletier in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

My argument in this thesis is that clear and distinct perception plays the role of the criterion for certainty in Descartes' argument for certainty.[1] That is, if some proposition, P, is understood clearly and distinctly, then I know it is true. Since I know it is true, I can be certain of it. His argument:

If I clearly and distinctly perceive P, then P is true
If P is true, then I can be metaphysically certain of P
If I clearly and distinctly perceive P, then I can be metaphysically certain of P

But upon closer examination of his argument, we notice that something besides clear and distinct perception is required as a criterion of truth. Because we may be metaphysically certain only of that which we know is true, the same criterion that is not sufficient for truth is not sufficient for certainty. Therefore, clear and distinct perception is not a sufficient criterion for metaphysical certainty. We must also prove the existence of a non-deceiving God.

Not only does Descartes' proof of the existence of such a deity fail, the entire argument for certainty fails because of it. Given his theory of truth, there is no justifiable way to do without the existence of God, and clear and distinct perception by itself cannot provide sufficient justification for truth, thus cannot be a sufficient criterion for metaphysical certainty.

1. By 'criteria' is meant the conditions, when fulfilled, which justify the application of a judgment, e.g. 'is certain', 'is true' or 'is false' to some proposition.

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PREFACE

In order to argue for my thesis I shall cover the following material: In Chapter I, I shall introduce Descartes' argument that certainty is attainable. A brief discussion of skepticism is needed for this. I shall discuss Descartes' skeptical position, which provides the rules he follows throughout his entire argument for certainty.

In Chapter II, I will investigate Meditation II for elements used in his final argument for certainty as it appears in Meditation III. That is, I shall bring out meanings for the terms used in his argument by examining his explanations in this Meditation.

My next chapter will be a discussion of his actual statement of the argument in Meditation III, plus its faults. Next will be a discussion of the arguments' failure by way of considering three modern philosophers' positions on the matter: Schouls, Feldman and Gewirth--concluding an attempt to salvage Descartes' faulty argument.

Finally, in Chapter V I shall discuss the failure of his criterion for metaphysical certainty, clear and distinct perception, to completely fulfill the role he hoped it would.

CHAPTER I

REJECTION OF CERTAINTY IN RESPONSE TO THE SKEPTICAL PROBLEM

Descartes' argument for certainty is nothing more than an attempt to refute skepticism by accepting all of its restrictions, then trying to surmount them and show that certainty is indeed possible.

Skepticism, put simply, is either the view that you can be certain of only one thing, that you cannot know anything at all (Academic skepticism); or the view that you cannot be certain of anything at all--including that you do not know anything at all (Pyrrhonian skepticism). That is, you cannot even be certain of the proposition, "Nobody can be certain of any proposition".

The problem of skepticism is a kind of infinite regress. To begin with the skeptic will not assume that any particular claim is true without justification. One must have evidence on which to base any knowledge claim, and principles allowing inferences from (e.g.) evidence to conclusion, or from proposition to proposition. But just as we must have a justification for the original knowledge claim in question--call it proposition Q--we have to have justification for the evidence for Q. We have to have a justification for something being a justification for the evidence for Q, and so on to infinity. That, in a very crude form, is the sort of dilemma that drives one into a skeptical position. There seem to be no ultimate unquestionable principles on which to base our knowledge.

Another statement of the problem by the skeptic Sextus Empiricus is perhaps clearer:

> Besides, in order to decide the dispute which has arisen about the criterion [of truth] , we must possess an accepted criterion by which we shall be able to judge the dispute; and in order to possess an accepted criterion, the dispute about the criterion must first be decided. And when the argument thus reduces itself to a form of circular reasoning the discovery of the criterion becomes impracticable, since we do not allow them to adopt a criterion assumption, while if they offer to judge the criterion by a criterion we force them to a regress ad infinitum.[2]

In light of the skeptic's observation that all judgments concerning truth must have a justification, and that all the justifications require more justification, what is needed for certainty on the skeptic's terms is a complete justification for truth. The certainty Descartes argues for is this sort of certainty, completely justified certainty. To be completely justified in being certain of some proposition, one must first know it is true. This accounts for the apparent exchange of 'truth' and 'certainty' here. This sort of certainty is called metaphysical certainty by Descartes scholars.[3]

For clarity's sake, we must bear in mind that one can feel certain of anything. Certainty is dependent on a person's attitude, not entirely on the truth value of what he is certain of. Descartes' metaphysical certainty is dependent on truth. That is, you can be metaphysically certain of some proposition or other only after you are

2. Outlines of Pyrrhonism, tr. R.G. Bury. Quoted in Rescher, The Coherence Theory of Truth. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973) p. 13

3. As far as I can tell, the only time Descartes applied the term 'metaphysical' was when referring to "slight doubt" (Meditation III). The kind of certainty where all metaphysical doubt is absent is thus called 'metaphysical certainty'.

sure it is true.[4]

Descartes enters the struggle for metaphysical certainty by his own admission:

> ....and I shall ever follow in this road until I have met with something which is certain, or at least, if I can do nothing else, until I have learned for certain that there is nothing in the world that is certain.[5]

Throughout this endeavor, everything is questioned--nothing is assumed to be certain. For this reason, we can truly say that his procedure obeys the skeptic position. Keeping with this position is done by following one simple rule: Withold assent from anything that is in any way dubious.

> But inasmuch as reason already persuades me that I ought no less carefully to withold my assent from matters which are not entirely certain and indubitable than from those which appear to me manifestly to be false, if I am able to find in each one some reason to doubt, this will suffice to justify my rejecting the whole.[6]

This sort of procedure, rejecting entirely anything which is in any wan uncertain, ought to yield only that which is entirely certain, or metaphysically certain. We could liken it to a sorting procedure whereby we throw away any article which is e.g. at all un-green. That is, any article having any color besides green in it or even being a mixture of colors which obscures the greenness of the article, is thrown away--leaving only those articles which are entirely green.

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4. This last statement will be defended as I continue explicating Descartes' argument for certainty.
5. The Philosophical Works of Descartes. Elizabeth Haldane and GRT Ross (tr) (Cambridge: University Press, 1972) Vol. I., p. 149. Hereafter references to these volumes shall be abbreviated "HR" with volume number "I" or "II" and the page number.
6. HR I: p. 145

As simple and objective as this procedure seems, one can see there is still some subjectivity involved. In the case of greenness, a definition for 'green' must be agreed upon. This is problematic if one is a skeptic. Likewise, in the case of propositions; it is not obvious what is "entirely certain and indubitable", since we cannot be sure what "indubitable" means. There are at least two reasons why some proposition is indubitable: 1) psychological and 2) logical. In the first case, one might find a proposition indubitable because one was psychologically unable to doubt it. For example, "God exists" may be indubitable to anyone who is a firm believer in God. If you truly have faith, you cannot doubt it. In the second case, one might find a prososition indubitable because it involves a contradiction to doubt it, or any doubt reaffirms the proposition. As an example of this, I offer the cogito, which will be discussed at length later on.

But this is a peripheral problem having to do with the ultimate essence of skepticism and the ultimate meaning of certainty. I only bring the problem up here to point out the difficulty involved in Descartes' endeavor. It would seem as simple as sorting colors, but it is not. By taking one definition for "metaphysical certainty", and one interpretation for "indubitable", I have made his argument seem clear. However, one must remember that as it is stated, it is a bit obscure and hard to follow.[7]

7. More defense for my interpretation of "indubitable" and "metaphysical certainty" will be offered later on. The greatest defense I can offer however, is that my interpretation makes his argument coherent.

After having stated his rule of witholding assent from all that is in any way dubitable, Descartes proceeds in the first Meditation to apply it to all that he took to be certain. At this point, all that he took to be certain happens to be knowledge learned through or from the senses.

> All that I have accepted as most true and certain I have learned either from the senses or through the senses....[8]

And the result of his doubting, or of his application of the rule for his endeavor, is that nothing at all is certain.

> ....but at the end I feel constrained to confess that there is nothing in all that I formerly believed to be true, of which I cannot in some measure doubt, and that not merely through want of thought or through levity, but for reasons which are very powerful and maturely considered.[9]

A condensed review of the effect of these "very powerful and maturely considered" reasons can be given in short order by presenting Descartes' most powerful doubting device,[10] the evil demon, along with his argument for the possible existence of such an entity. I bring this detail from the first Meditation up only to set the stage, as it were, for what is to follow. We must make clear what is no longer considered indubitable by Descartes, for it has importance on what he finally does consider indubitable.

The introduction of the evil demon amounts to the introduction of the assumption that it is possible that there may be an all-powerful

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8. HR I: p. 145
9. HR I: p. 147-148
10. Other reasons for doubting parts of what we took to be certain in Meditation I are less powerful. That is, they only throw some of our knowledge into doubt. Two more are: Inadequacy of the senses, (HRI: p. 145) and the dream argument (HR I: p. 146).

being who brings it to pass

> ....that there is no earth, no heaven, no extended body, no magnitude, no place, and that nevertheless [I possess the perceptions of all these things and that] they seem to me to exist just exactly as I now see them.[11]

In other words, it is the introduction of an all-powerful being who brings it to pass that none of my ideas correspond to reality, since there is no reality for them to correspond to.[12]

To support this massive doubt that any or all of my ideas are true (in the sense of corresponding to reality--and this is what Descartes takes 'true' to mean), he offers the following argument:

> But possibly God has not desired that I should be thus deceived, for He is said to be supremely good. If, however, it is contrary to His goodness to have made me such that I constantly deceive myself, it would also appear contrary to His goodness to permit me to be sometimes deceived, and nevertheless I cannot doubt that He does permit this.[13]

That is to say: If it is not contrary to the goodness of God (if it is possible) that I am sometimes deceived; then it is not contrary to His goodness (it is possible) that I am <u>always</u> deceived. It is not contrary to the goodness of God that I am sometimes deceived, for I am, in fact, sometimes deceived. Not only is it <u>possible</u> that I am sometimes deceived, I am sometimes deceived. Therefore, it is not contrary to his goodness that I am always deceived. It

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11. HR I: p. 147
12. 'Reality' I shall define as "all those things I perceive as existing outside myself". Perhaps a clearer way to refer to it would be "extra-mental reality". Although not strictly precise, this definition is close to what Descartes must have had in mind. Another item deserving of discussion is doubt of mathematics <u>via</u> the absence of "extra-mental reality", since Descartes doubts the truth of mathematics for precisely that reason here. However, such a discussion is irrelevant to my thesis. For an interesting discussion, see H. Frankfurt, <u>Demons, Dreamers and Madmen</u>. (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1970) Chapter VII.
13. HR I: p. 147

is possible that I am always deceived (by modus ponens).

By this argument the possibility of there being an all-powerful deceiver is defended. Thus there is nothing to prevent us from believing that all we took to be true is false.

CHAPTER II

ONE CERTAINTY

Whereas Chapter I proceeded straightforwardly from argument to argument, this chapter stops to examine the results of the first conclusion in Meditation II. After that, it departs somewhat from Descartes' own aim in Meditation II. His purpose is to show that " [The mind] is more easily known than the body".[14] But in showing this conclusion, Descartes relies on terms we are interested in, such as 'truth', 'certainty', and 'clear and distinct perception'. By noting the function of these terms wherever they are used in the second Meditation, we can see the meaning they had to Descartes and the connection they have to one another. I shall depart, therefore, from Descartes' progression in Meditation II in order to expose what he has shown us about these terms, all of which are very important to the argument for certainty.

The position we have arrived at by various arguments in Meditation I is elaborately stated as follows:

> I suppose then, that all the things that I see are false; I persuade myself that nothing has ever existed of all that my fallacious memory represents to me. I consider that I possess no senses; I imagine that body, figure, extension, movement and place are but the fictions of my mind. What then can be esteemed as true?[15]

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14. Title of the second Meditation: "Of the Nature of the Human Mind; and that it is more easily known than the Body." HR I: p. 149.
15. HR I: p. 149

This is an impressively long list of things which are false. If anything does exist, and if anything is true, it must be distinct from what has been named in the above quote. The question is, is there anything apart from "senses, body, figure, extension, movement and place"? The next question Descartes asks is, "I myself, am I not at least something?"[16] Following this, he must ask if he is distinct from all of the things that are dubious.

> But I was persuaded that there was nothing in all the world, that there was no heaven, no earth, that there were no minds, nor any bodies: was I not then likewise persuaded that I did not exist?[17]

In other words, does it follow from the fact that all of these things are dubious that I must doubt I exist as well? The conclusion is that he does not, indeed cannot, doubt that he exists.

> ....of a surety I myself did exist since I persuaded myself of something [or merely because I thought of something].[18]

The conclusion that he exists is consistent with all that has gone before. Since thinking has never been doubted, and since his thinking is the reason he directly concludes he exists, his conclusion is not doubted either. "I exist" is based on undoubted evidence. Not only is "thinking" undoubted, it cannot be doubted. It is indubitable: not even the evil demon can throw doubt on it.

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16. HR I: p. 150
17. loc. cit.
18. loc. cit.

> But there is some deceiver or other, very powerful and very cunning who ever employs his ingenuity in deceiving me. Then without doubt I exist also if he deceives me....[19]

I exist because even if I am deceived in thinking I exist, I am still deceived. Being deceived is a mental state, and all mental states are "thinking". From the fact that I am deceived in thinking I exist, I can conclude still that I am thinking; from that I can conclude I exist. If I may go on a little further, the next step is that Descartes concludes from all of this that he is certain he exists--"I who am certain that I am".[20]

We see by these quotations that the progression goes as follows: The proposition, "I am, I exist" is necessarily true because it is indubitable, and he is certain of it because it is necessarily true. This shows that the relation between 'certainty' (metaphysical certainty) and 'truth' in Descartes is as I took it to be earlier.[21] It merely follows from his doubting regime--if anything is doubtful, it may be false; thus one cannot be certain of it. If it is not doubtful at all, it must be true, and one can be metaphysically certain of it.

We already can see that he has arrived at an indubitable proposition and he calls it 'certain'. Since his criterion for 'certainty' from the very beginning was 'indubitability', we may safely say he has, by his own rule, arrived at a certainty. In order to see where this "certainty" gets us, we can ask two misleadingly simple questions: 1) how much and 2) what kind. By

19. loc. cit.
20. loc. cit.
21. See above, pp. 2-3.

answering "how much", we can discover how much certainty he has argued for successfully. We can clarify how much of what was dubious and rejected as false before is now certain. This is the same as asking "Does anything follow from the one certain proposition, 'I am, I exist each time that I pronounce it or that I mentally conceive it.'?" (i.e. cogito ergo sum) It is possible that many certain propositions follow from this one, and that this is sufficient certainty for concluding the search for certainty he engaged in at the beginning of this enterprise.

At the beginning of Meditation II, Descartes did say (as I quoted above) that he would follow this doubting procedure until he has "met with something which is certain, or at least"....until he has learned for certain that there is nothing in the world which is certain.[22] Since he has now met with "something which is certain", he could conclude the enterprise. He does not, however, do so. Right after arriving at cogito ergo sum, he goes on searching for more things that are certain.

His stated over-all aim for the doubting procedure in the Meditations would lead us to believe that cogito ergo sum is not sufficient to conclude his enterprise.

> In the first Meditation I set forth the reasons for which we may, generally speaking, doubt about all things and especially about material things....But although the utility of a Doubt which is so general does not at first appear, it is at the same time very great....it makes it impossible for us to doubt those things which we have once discovered to be true.[23]

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22. HR I: p. 149
23. HR I: p. 140

In fact, his aim seems to be making us certain about "material things" *via* this doubting procedure. He wants to give us back the physical world in a way that we may never doubt it again.

Strictly speaking, the search for certainty about extra-mental reality continues in *Meditation III*, but at this point in *Meditation II* he investigates a possibly-extent object, wax. We shall explore this investigation as an example of clear and distinct perception later on, but it can be viewed now as a subtle showing of his final aim: metaphysical certainty about "material things". He was never really interested in findinf only one certainty, he was only interested in that one certainty insofar as it gave him a beginning in his search for true certainty--his Archimedean point from which he "might draw the terrestrial globe out of its place". From this, we may conclude that *cogito ergo sum* alone is not sufficient certainty to conclude the enterprise.[24]

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24. Further to my earlier discussion concerning whether deciding whether something is 'metaphysically certain' is a psychological or a logical matter: We are now in a better position to argue for one or the other alternative, since terms like 'indubitable', 'true', and 'certain' have been used by Descartes. I shall point out briefly how, exactly, a problem in deciding between alternatives arises, and also give evidence which offers a particular alternative credibility.

If certainty were *merely* a matter of being in a particular mental state (psychological), it would depend entirely on someone's *feeling* certain. If he felt a particular way, then he could conclude that he was certain--even metaphysically certain. It seems that Descartes did not intend this alternative alone to be the meaning of 'metaphysical certainty', since 'metaphysical certainty' follows from knowing something is *true*, and true follows from its being *indubitable*. But, as I mentioned before, one could be psychologically unable to doubt a proposition and conclude from that that it was indubitable. However, Descartes has *argued* for the dubitability and/or indubitability of every proposition he considers. Thus, he does not

What is more, the significance of the one certainty, cogito ergo sum, does not come from the fact that anything else can be inferred from it. Nothing can be inferred from it. The fact that Descartes is certain he exists every time he pronounces it or thinks about it does not yield any further conclusion about anything else in the world. The answer to the first question, "how much certainty", is "very little", only the one proposition. All hopes for cogito ergo sum center around its providing some criterion for finding other things which are indubitable. Since we have seen that it alone is not enough certainty to conclude the enterprise and nothing more follows from it, this seems like the most probable reason for its importance in Descartes' argument: a provider of a criterion for certainty.

This brings us to the second question "what kind of certainty is it", In order to recognize the criteria (if any) cogito ergo sum provides for further certainty, we have to consider exactly what it is

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24. (continued)
intend dubitability to depend on feeling in any certain way. (c.f. arguments in Meditation I for doubt, plus cogito ergo sum argument in Meditation II for indubitability.)

Furthermore, 'truth' has another meaning besides 'indubitability' as was expressed in the cogito argument. It also means correspondence to reality for Descartes (c.f. Meditation I evil demon argument.) Correspondence to reality is independent of feeling. So, certainty comes from two things which are independent of feeling: indubitability via argumentation, and truth via correspondence. However, certainty is dependent on minds. Something is certain if someone is certain of it. Descartes' use of certainty is dependent on a persons' apprehending that things are certain (as is everyone's use of certainty)--so in that sense, it is psychological. But that is the only sense in which it is so. Given the above evidence, plus the added fact that Descartes considers it unjustified to conclude you are certain without first knowing said proposition is true, there is a large non-psychological and objective aspect about 'metaphysical certainty'. If we had to choose between the two stated alternatives, it would be more credible to choose the one whereby certainty decisions are a logical matter.

about the cogito that makes it certain. By 'kind' then, I mean whatever it is in the cogito that makes the latter certain. If for example, the certainty of the cogito were because of a particular logical form or if it indeed has any elements which are generalizable to other propositions, the search for certainty would take a definite course: merely looking for the same form or elements in all other propositions. This is one way the argument could go; therefore we are wise to consider it.

We have already noted that the cogito has the element of being an indubitable proposition, which makes it certain. But the proposition itself is not of such a logical form that it can be generalized and maintain its indubitable status. If you assign a different individual to the cogito proposition it is no longer certain. For example: "I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it or that I mentally conceive it " is indeed necessarily true. But"Gerald is, Gerald exists, is true each time Gerald pronounces it or mentally conceives it " may be true, but we can doubt it. Even if Gerald did think, it would not follow from that that he existed. An example by Hintikka perhaps makes this point clearer:

> Hamlet did think a great many things, does it follow that he existed?[25]

There are certain propositions which are indubitable by virtue of their logical form. A very simple one is $(P \rightarrow P)$. If any proposition,

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25. Jaakko Hintikka, "Cogito, ergo sum: Inference or Performance?" In: Sesonske & Fleming (eds.) Meta-Meditations: Studies in Descartes. (California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc. 1966) p. 55.
One might object to this example for the reason that Hamlet only thought "fictionally". However it is a legitimate case of applying the logical structure of the cogito to another individual and it is a case where the logical structure yields a judgment of 'false'. Therefore, it is admissible.

P, is true, it follows that it is true. Also, it is not the case that some proposition is both true and false (at the same time, in the same identical sense) or, $\sim(P \cdot \sim P)$. It has often been said that tautologies say nothing whatsoever of any importance about the physical world, but they are indubitable by virtue of their form for they are always true. I have demonstrated that the cogito is not a proposition which is true by virtue of its form only.

Rather, the cogito is indubitable because the conditions for its being stated are the conditions for its being true. The indubitability lies in the phrase, "each time I pronounce it or that I mentally conceive it". The proposition "I think, therefore I exist" is not what is indubitable, it is the statement or utterance of that proposition which is indubitable.

There is a distinction to be noted here: a sentence (or proposition) is a grammatical entity by itself. It remains a sentence whether anyone utters it or not. An utterance is a speech act--more simply, saying something. It may be either public or private. That is, you may perform the speech act to yourself alone by thinking something, or to everyone within earshot by saying something out loud. The utterance of a sentence is a statement. We may view a statement as that which gives life (as it were) to a neutral entity, a group of words.[26]

So it is the statement of the proposition, "I think, therefore I exist", that is the subject of indubitability. Descartes himself

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26. This material is loosely drawn from a footnote in Hintikka, op. cit. p. 47 (footnote #21).

makes no mistake about this matter. What he called 'necessarily true' is cogito ergo sum plus "each time I pronounce it or mentally conceive it". B. Williams agrees:

> ...."I think" or "I exist" is not a logical truth or a tautology. It is, in a sense, perfectly clear that these propositions belong to a class of propositions that are true if they are asserted, conceived, etc., and not to the class of propositions that are true no matter what the facts may be.[27]

What is more, the cogito, which is a member of this peculiar class of propositions, is always certain because of the utter--"I". As one of the latter-day cogito students said, "I" can never miss its mark. It always refers to something (namely the utterer) and thus it is always true.[28] A quote from Ayer may make this point clearer:

> The sentence 'I exist',....may be allowed to express a statement which like other statements is capable of being either true or false. It differs, however, from most other statements in that if it is false, it cannot actually be made. Consequently no one who uses these words intelligently and correctly can use them to make a statement which he knows to be false. If he succeeds in making the statement, it must be true.[29]

By what has been said above in answer to "what kind of certainty cogito ergo sum is", we see that it is not of some logical form which is always certain. It is a peculiar sort of proposition which is indubitable for unique reasons. These reasons surely are not applicable to propositions, say, about the physical world. These reasons, then, cannot serve as the criteria for certainty in general. We can see

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27. B. Williams, "The Certainty of the Cogito" In: Willis Doney (ed.) Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc.) p. 101.
28. Note in our earlier example with Gerald, one reason why it was dubitable is that there may be no "real" person to whom 'Gerald' refers.
29. A.J. Ayer, "'I think, therefore I am'". Willis Doney, op. cit.p.85.

again why Descartes continues his search after having discovered the cogito, it is a particular certainty that leads nowhere. Furthermore, this is why he names something else as the importance of the cogito--namely, that it is clear and distinct. We shall see that according to Descartes it is clear and distinct perception of things which makes us certain of them; we shall see that he takes that to be the criterion for certainty.

The best way to support these two statements I have just made is simply to continue explicating Meditation II; for Descartes there introduces the terms 'clear and distinct' and gives demonstrations of their application. Directly after the cogito argument I have been discussing comes a discussion of what "I am", what is this "I" that has just been shown to exist? "But I do not yet know clearly enough what I am, I who am certain that I am."[30]

This quest for knowledge of his essence is an example of the search for clear and distinct perception. Using the certainty--thinking--he investigates the notion of his essence. Since all that is corporeal is dubitable, "body" cannot belong to his essence with any certainty. Nevertheless, he reviews a list of possible attributes and arrives at thinking:

> What of thinking? I find here that thought is an attribute that belongs to me; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am, I exist, that is certain. But how often? Just when I think....[31]

This essence investigation involves only an exercise of the mind. This keeps clear and distinct perception rooted in the one certainty, thinking; and distinguishes it from the dubious "knowledge through and from the

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30. HR I: p. 150
31. HR I: p. 151

senses" mentioned in Meditation I. We note in defense of this view that he never looks to see what belongs to him, nor does he feel, nor does he listen to anyone tell him. At the conclusion of this investigation of what his essence is, he makes his first mention of clearness and distinctness.[32]

> From this time I begin to know what I am with a little more clearness and distinction than before....[33]

Next, Descartes takes the first step toward certainty about the corporeal world (although he does not intend it as such at this stage of his argument) by investigating a possibly existent "corporeal thing", wax. Whatever is indubitable about the wax is a result of clearly and distinctly perceiving; so it is implied that other things discovered in this way are the things we can be certain of too. If anything at all is found to be known about the wax via clear and distinct perception, we may begin to hope that perhaps we can, once again, be certain of at least something in the corporeal world.

What is clearly known about the wax is limited: "Let us attentively consider this, [the wax] and abstracting from all that does not belong to the wax, let us see what remains. Certainly nothing remains excepting a certain extended thing which is flexible and moveable."[34] So, all we can know about the wax without solely

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32. I have not gone into the content of this investigation at all. That is, I have not delved into what essence means to Descartes, nor have I delved into clearly and distinctly perceiving--other than to maintain that it is some sort of process involving the attribute of thinking only. It is, unfortunately, outside the scope of my thesis to do so. I only intend to show here that clearness and distinctness are the criteria for certainty. Besides that, all I need is what I have already maintained.
33. HR I: p. 153
34. HR I: p. 154

employing the suspect senses is that it is flexible, extended and moveable. Again, a discussion has revolved around essence. Descartes has asked over and over, "What is it that stays the same" or "How do we know we still have a piece of wax in spite of many of the sensory properties of it changing?"

The important point about the wax argument, as in the essence of "I" argument, is to show that all which will be certain is known by the mind rather than through the senses.

> But what must particularly be observed is that its [the wax's] perception is neither an act of vision, nor of touch, nor of imagination, and has never been such although it may have appeared formerly to be so, but only an intuition of the mind, which may be imperfect and confused as it was formerly, or clear and distinct as it is at present....[35]

We can't have known the wax via the senses, because the sensory properties disappeared and changed. The sensory properties were unreliable as an indicator of what wax is. Descartes infers from this that our knowing the wax, or knowing that we still have wax even though it has changed from something hard to a puddle, is a result of our understanding. We have understood the changes, and by our having done so, can recognize that we still have wax before us. If our perception of wax had been through the senses only, how could we have avoided becoming totally confused throughout its changes in physical properties?

A conclusion that can be drawn from the arguments in the second Meditation (although this is not Descartes' main conclusion) is that

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35. HR I: p. 155

all that can be known is known by the understanding. What is more, it must be understood clearly and distinctly by the mind before we know it. ("And what I have here remarked of wax may be applied to all other things which are external to me [and which are met with outside of me] ."[36] The conclusion:

> The point I desired....Since it is now manifest to me that even bodies are not properly speaking known by the senses or by the faculty of imagination, but by the understanding only, and....they are not known from the fact that they are seen or touched, but only because they are understood....[37]

What have we arrived at? I think it is best expressed in the following way: Anything we can be metaphysically certain of is something we know is true and find indubitable. Everything we know, we know by the understanding--by clear and distinct perception.

His argument has progressed in this way: He gives us something which is indubitable (cogito), and shows that indubitability is something found in this and other propositions only when they are clearly and distinctly perceived. Since what is indubitable is certain, and what is indubitable is found by clear and distinct perception; then if we want to find anything which is certain, we must first clearly and distinctly perceive. Thus we have the criterion for finding what is certain--it is clear and distinct perception. In Meditation III he will state this explicitly and argue that clearly and distinctly perceiving any proposition is a sufficient criterion for being metaphysically certain of it.

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36. HR I: p. 156
37. HR I: p. 157

From Descartes' demonstrations in Meditation II we can form a conclusion: "If I clearly and distinctly perceive something, I have some justification for knowing it is true; since the things I do seem to know have been discovered by this mode of inquiry." In Meditation III he will try to prove a stronger conclusion: "All those things which I clearly and distinctly perceive are true." Once that is proven, we may be certain of all clearly and distinctly perceived things for we will have a complete justification for doing so. That justification will be that there is no reason to doubt that all I clearly and distinctly perceive is true. If there is no reason to doubt, it is indubitable, thus certain. A complete justification is what the skeptics demand, and Descartes will have met the demand and surmounted it--if the proof is successful.

CHAPTER III

THE ARGUMENT FOR METAPHYSICAL CERTAINTY

If Meditation II left us with any doubt that the significance of the cogito was that it provided clear and distinct perception as a criterion of certainty, this passage from early in Meditation III should clear that doubt up:

> Certainly in this first knowledge (cogito ergo sum) there is nothing that assures me of its truth, excepting the clear and distinct perception of that which I state....[38]

The purpose of the argument here in Meditation III is to prove metaphysical certainty is possible using the criterion of clear and distinct perception. Descartes attempts to make clear and distinct perception sufficient justification for concluding one is certain of any proposition. If I clearly and distinctly perceive some ϕ, I am entirely justified in concluding it is true. Since I know it is true, I may be certain of it.[39]

To reiterate: Descartes gives us something which is indubitable, the cogito, labels it a "clear and distinct perception"; shows what a clear and distinct perception involves and how to get one (via the Meditation II demonstrations); then attempts to show that all perceptions which are clear and distinct are true; concluding that we may be certain of all those propositions we have clearly and distinctly perceived.

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38. HR I: p. 158

39. The only sense of 'certain Descartes has been interested in from the beginning of the Meditations, and the only sense used since the end of Meditation I is 'metaphysical certainty'. Therefore, I shall not state "metaphysical" certainty anymore--it should be understood that 'certainty' means 'metaphysical certainty'.

So, at the beginning of Meditation III, Descartes sets about to prove the proposition "All that is clearly and distinctly perceived is true." This meditation is most correctly interpreted (in my view) as a proof for this proposition constructed in the following way:

Having already set the rule that only must not reject beliefs for frivolous reasons,[40] Descartes begins his proof by looking for a good reason why we might doubt that all we perceive clearly and distinctly is true. This method of proof is identical to the one used from the very beginning of the Meditations. That is, if something is in any way doubtful, we must withold assent from it. In this light, he is looking for some way we might doubt what he intends to prove. He concludes that the only reason to doubt "all we clearly and distinctly perceive is true" is if there is an evil demon.

> But when I took anything very simple and easy in the sphere of arithemetic or geometry into consideration, e.g. that two and three together make five, and other things of the sort, were not these present to my mind so clearly as to enable me to affirm that they were true? Certainly if I judged that since such matters could be doubted, this would not have been so for any reason than that it came into my mind that perhaps a God might have endowed me with such a nature that I may have been deceived even concerning things which seemed to me most manifest.[41]

40. "....and that not merely through want of thought or through levity, but for reasons which are very powerful and maturely considered." HR I: p. 148 (my underlining)
41. HR I: p. 158 (my underlining)

Recalling that all we have been discussing as entirely indubitable so far has been within the sphere of the understanding (and this involves only the cogito); we should take this passage to indicate doubt of clear and distinct perception, but not doubt of the indubitable. He says here that "two plus three equals five" is apprehended clearly by the mind (we can take it he means clearly and distinctly perceived). Yet "things of this sort" may be dubitable if there is an evil demon. I hope this brings no problem. As I explained on pages 5 & 6 above, the evil demon throws things into doubt by allowing the possibility that there is no heaven or earth. If there is no extra-mental reality, none of our ideas of things would correspond to anything and there would be no instances of abstract ideas such as "magnitude", "extension" and "quantity". On Descartes' correspondence theory of truth, all these ideas would then be false. No matter how clearly and distinctly understood they are by our minds, if they do not correspond to anything, they are false.

In order to guarantee that all clearly and distinctly perceived ideas are true, he must guarantee the existence of extra-mental reality. In order to do that, Descartes believes all he must do is dis-prove the existence of an evil demon.[42] Given that the evil demon is the only reason to doubt extra-mental reality, Descartes must either prove that there is no all-powerful being whatsoever--yielding the conclusion that nothing is powerful enough to affect the truth of his

42. I say "Descartes believes all he must do...." because there may be other reasons to doubt reality. Dis-proving the evil demon may not be all he has to do.

clear and distinct perceptions; or prove that there is an all-powerful being and that he is not a deceiver. Descartes takes the latter alternative:

> But in order to be able altogether to remove it [doubt] , I must inquire whether there is a God as soon as the occasion presents itself; and if I find that there is a God, I must also inquire whether He may be a deceiver; for without a knowledge of these two truths I do not see that I can ever be certain of anything.[43]

To reiterate, Descartes holds that the possible existence of an evil demon is the only reason powerful enough to throw clear and distinct perception into doubt. There is only an evil demon if there is a most powerful being, God. If descartes can prove there is a God, and prove that He is not a deceiver, he can be certain of all he perceives clearly and distinctly (since all he perceives clearly and distinctly will be true). If he cannot prove these two things, he can never be certain.

Descartes now goes on to prove there is a God. He engages in a lengthy discussion of ideas, categorizing them according to Reality content"; pointing out that the idea of God has more "Objective reality" than any idea of a finite thing (e.g. Descartes himself) has formal reality.[44] After this groundwork, he offers a proof which I have condensed and clarified into premises as follows:

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43. HR I: p. 159
44. HR I: p. 162

1. Ideas contain in themselves a certain objective reality (HR I: p. 162)
2. This objective reality is "without doubt" derived from a cause. (HR I: p. 163)
3. The objective reality of an idea is less than or equal to the formal reality of its cause.
   (This is manifest by the natural light)[45]
4. The idea of God has more objective reality than any finite creature has formal reality. (From groundwork on p. 162)
5. The idea of God cannot have come from my own (finite) mind. (From 3 & 4)
6. "....It follows of necessity that I am not alone in the world, but that there is another being which exists, or which is the cause of this idea." (From 2 & 5) (HR I: p. 163)
7. "....Hence, from what has already been said, we must conclude that God necessarily exists." (HR I: p. 165)

Essentially, the proof is based on the premise that every single idea must have a cause; and the assertion that all ideas have a certain amoung of "objective" reality in them which comes from the "formal" reality contained in the cause of that idea. There is a rule given by Descartes that no idea can have more objective reality than its cause has formal reality. After this framework has been set up by Descartes, the idea of God is added. It is claimed to have more objective reality than whatever formal reality is in Descartes. If this is so, by the rule (premise 3 of the above argument), the idea must have come from something other than Descartes. Furthermore, since the idea is of what is perfect, it must have been produced by some being[46] who is perfect (or infinite). The being answering to such a description is God. Thus it has been shown that God exists.

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45. "Now it is manifest by the natural light that there must be at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in its effect." (HR I: p. 162)
46. Descartes moves from some cause, to some being as the cause of the idea of God. There is no justification or discussion surrounding this shift.

I do not know how one ought to understand "objective reality" of an idea and "formal reality" of the cause of an idea. As far as I am concerned Descartes does not conclusively argue in the Meditations for there being such entities, nor does he anywhere clearly explain what all this means. He merely asserts that this is the case. This is a serious problem with the above proof as we shall see shortly.

There are two objections to the proof: The first by Arnauld[47] is very old, and very well known. One way to put it is that Descartes' use of "natural light" in premise 3 is objectionable. Since we are trying to prove that "what is manifest by the natural light" is true, we may not use it (natural light) to verify a premise; for that is circular. (This objection will be dealt with at length later on.) The second objection is that while the proof may be a valid one, there is no defense of premises 1 - 4; thus we are at pains to accept the argument as sound. It could only be judged sound without defense if premisses 1 - 4 were tautologies. They are not, however; and this means the lack of argumentation for them leaves the whole argument stranded in the realm of validity rather than soundness.

As noted by Popkin,[48] it is premise 3, if true, that could lead us from the certainty of the cogito to certainty of all clear and distinct ideas. The premise, better stated as a slightly more general axiom--"Whatever degree of reality any idea has objectively, it must have that much (or more) formally"--says no more than what

47. HR II: p. 92
48. Popkin, Richard H., The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Descartes. (Netherlands: Koninklijke Van Gorcum & Comp., 1960) p. 190

appears real in my ideas is present outside my mind as REALITY. It is a simple assertion against ideas being merely illusions. Descartes' defense of the axiom in Replies to Second Objections[49] is most disheartening: he claims that the axiom is true because it is clear and distinct. That claim, since unsupported, is enough to make us agree with Arnauld. Descartes seems to assume what is clear and distinct is true, yet he has not yet proven this is so. He cannot claim that this axiom used in his proof that all he perceives clearly and distinctly is true, is true because it is clear and distinct.

If the above proof is not circular, I hold it at least needs to have its soundness demonstrated; for if it is sound, that is not apparent from the logical form of the premisses, nor from the text. As such, it cannot serve to prove that all we clearly and distinctly perceive is true. Furthermore, we can by all rights regard this one proof and its failure as conclusively finishing the whole attempt if we use Descartes' own standards.

> On the other hand, had no such idea [of God] existed in me, I should have had no sufficient argument to convince me of the existence of any being beyond myself; for I have made very careful investigation everywhere and up to the present time have been able to find no other ground.[50]

In the above quotation he is saying the idea of God is the only reason to believe there is a God, so the proof employing perfection or "reality content" of the idea of God should be conclusive proof

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49. HR II: p. 55-6
50. HR I: p. 163

of God's existence, since there is "no other ground".

There is, however, another proof for the existence of God offered by Descartes:

> It is as a matter of fact perfectly clear and evident to all those who consider with attention the nature of time, that, in order to be conserved in each moment which it endures, a substance has need of the same power and action as would be necessary to produce and create it anew, supposing it did not yet exist, so that the light of nature shows us clearly that the distinction between creation and conservation is solely a distinction of the reason.[51]

The above passage, when separated out into premises, and added to the one certainty, "I exist", yields another proof for the existence of God. After all, if I exist, (and it is certain that I do) I must at this moment be caused to continue to exist by some powerful being.[52] It would follow that the existence of the greatest, most powerful being is certain as well.

Without my bothering to separate off premisses and rules of inference, we can see this argument will fall prey to the same objections the first one did. Use of suspect terms such as "perfectly clear and evident", and "light of nature" occur in this proof, so Arnauld's objection holds. And, proof for the premisses concerning first creation, and caused continued existence is needed; making the proof prey to the second objection I stated above--its soundness needs to be demonstrated.

Even if Descartes has failed in his proofs for the existence of

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51. HR I: p. 168
52. HR I: p. 169

God, there is a rather nice piece of argumentation similar to the ontological argument. The similarity lies in employing the definition of God as a premise.[53] Assuming he has proven the existence of God (all-powerful, all-good, all-knowing, by definition) then there can be no evil demon.

> From this it is manifest that He cannot be a deceiver, since the light of nature teaches us that fraud and deception necessarily proceed from some defect.[54]

The "light of nature" in this case shows us something that is indeed necessary. If God$_{=def}$ "The greatest or most powerful of all possible beings" and deception is contradictory to "the most powerful" because it is a weakness, then God cannot be a deceiver.

The condition of the argument in this third Meditation, in any case is problematic. Using Descartes' own guideline, "for without knowledge of the two truths that there is a God and that He is no deceiver I do not see that I can ever be certain of anything";[55] we are left in a state of almost total uncertainty.

After having thrown everything he took to be certain into doubt, finding one certainty (cogito ergo sum), he cannot get to certainty on any full scale. Given that Descartes meant us to be able to reach certainty on a large correspondence level, and not just stop at the

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53. The ontological argument uses inference from the definition of God in a way similar to this argument. In the case of the ontological argument; if God is the greatest of all possible beings, then he must "possess" existence. In this argument, the premise employed is the same: God is the greatest of all possible beings. The inference, that He must possess no weaknesses, is arrived at in the same way.
54. HRI: p. 171
55. HRI: p. 159

one certainty of our own existence, we should attempt to sort out the problems with his proof. Starting with "all that is clear and distinct is true", we shall see if some resurrection of hope for this conclusion can be found by a more detailed investigation of the argument's failure.

I have already pointed out in this chapter the two major problems with the proof for certainty in Meditation III. These are simply validity (circularity), and soundness. So far, I have given a brief explanation of the objection by Arnauld, otherwise known as the "Cartesian Circle". In the next chapter, I will state the objection in Arnauld's precise terms and then examine three solutions to the objection. This is how we shall see whether the problems with the argument are solvable or not.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTIONS TO THE ARGUMENT'S FAILURE

In a general sense, the problem most evident in Descartes' argument for certainty is his very first "rule", that all that is in any way dubious shall be rejected. It is this very firm command that forces us to reject the Meditation III arguments for the existence of God; for we must not only have a plausible or well-justified argument, we must have a completely justified argument. And that argument must completely justify the conclusion aimed for at the outset: "All I clearly and distinctly perceive is true". We are not being overly critical or needlessly precise in the criticism of Meditation III; we are merely following Descartes' own rule from the beginning of the Meditations. "All I perceive clearly and distinctly is true" is thrown into doubt by the possible existence of a being powerful enough to make it only seem that there is a reality; the arguments to prove there is no such being are thrown into doubt by apparent circularity and by questionable soundness.

Let me give the classic statement of the objection, the "Cartesian Circle" by Arnauld:

> The only remaining scruple I have is an uncertainty as to how a circular reasoning is to be avoided in saying: The only secure reason we have for believing that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true, is the fact that God exists. But we can say that God exists, only because we clearly and evidently perceive that; therefore, prior to being certain that God exists, we should be certain that whatever we clearly and evidently perceive is true.[56]

56. HR I: p. 92

While the problem seems evident enough, a number of quite successful roads out of it have been offered. The first one I shall discuss is found in an article by Schouls, "Descartes and the Autonomy of Reason".[57]

Schouls' method of attack is to defend the claim that the specific kind of reason referred to by Descartes in his proofs, "natural light", is never doubted by Descartes. If never doubted, obviously it can be used as justification of premisses in the arguments. In short, it is not circular to say such and such a premise is true because the natural light tells me so; for it is another function of reason that is in question.

Schouls examines passages where it appears reason (natural light) has been cast into doubt, showing there is a valid distinction to be made in functions of reason which leaves natural light free from doubt.

There are two main functions of reason in Descartes: Deduction and Intuition. The first is called by Schouls "intuition-on-the-move"[58] and consists in perceiving the connections between already perceived simples. (Immediately grasped notions are "simples".) The second is the faculty by which we immediately grasp simples, or self-evident data. (Arguments supporting the existence in Descartes of these two kinds of reason appear on p. 315 of Schouls' article.)

57. Schouls, op. cit., Journal of the History of Philosophy. Vol. X No. 3. July, 1972
58. Schouls, op. cit. p. 312

A further distinction is made in terms of the objects of reason. The objects of intuition are simple (or known per se).

> The object of a deduction is compounded from simple(r) elements; hence whatever is deduced can be divided or analysed into, or defined in terms of its simple(r) components.[59]

For clarity's sake, we must note that simple, self-evident data cannot be divided into simpler elements; and what is known per se cannot be derived.

Next, we ask what about the immediate perception of the conclusion of a deduction. After we have gone through the steps of deduction, the act of comprehending the conclusion of the deduction can be described in no other way but as an act of intuition. But there is a difference, the conclusion being complex, can be broken down into simple(r) elements. Because of this difference, Schouls calls it intuition$_2$.

Examination of passages where doubting occurs in the Meditations supports Schouls' conclusion that intuition$_1$ (natural light) is never doubted. The first thing thrown into doubt, sense experience, does not tell against this interpretation. Sense experience, after all, is not an act of the reason. The sciences, which definitely are concerned with reason, are doubted in Meditation I.

> That is possibly why our reasoning is not unjust when we conclude from this that Physics, Astronomy, Medicine and all other sciences which have as their end the consideration of composite things, are very dubious and uncertain....[60]

59. Schouls, op. cit. p. 313 (my underlining)
60. HR I: p. 147

This doubt is due to deductions being necessary to reach the conclusions. Further, the object of scientific investigation is "extended corporeal nature"; and "extended corporeal nature" is divisible; therefore, the object of the sciences is divisible. Since it is divisible, it cannot be an object of intuition$_1$--it must be an object (at best) of intuition$_2$.[61]

The next area Descartes casts doubt on, pure mathematics, is a more difficult matter to grasp. Descartes states that the object of pure mathematics is simple,[62] seemingly contradicting Schouls' interpretation. However, says Schouls, mathematical operations are deductions. All the components may be simple, true enough, but since operations are performed and inferences are drawn, mathematics is deduction. The passage wherein Descartes doubts the truth of mathematics should be read with a stress on "adding" and "counting".

> ....how do I know that I am not deceived every time that I add two and three, or count the sides of a square, or judge of things yet simpler, if anything simpler can be imagined.[63]

It is not intuition of the components, the intuition of numbers themselves, that is thrown into doubt by the evil demon, but rather our deductions from them.

Schouls offers two very good supports from general Cartesian doctrine for his view. The first is a verification by Descartes that some things can be known with certainty--a later qualification

61. Schouls, op. cit. p. 317 & 318
62. HR I: p. 147
63. loc. cit.

made by Descartes of how much he actually meant to throw into doubt. This is helpful, but since it occurs outside the Meditations,[64] I am not sure my original task--to see where the argument from the Meditations alone gets us with regard to certainty--allows me to lean on this support very heavily.

The second of the above-mentioned supports involves how much of a skeptic one can be while using argumentation such as that used by Descartes. This support[65] is essentially an explanation of why it "makes good sense" to hold that Descartes never doubted intuition$_1$.

> If the evil genius hypothesis applies to all exercises of reason the hypothesis is, first, meaningless because untestable and therefore, second the hypothesis cannot be rejected.[66]

It follows that the entire Meditations would be meaningless as well as the evil demon hypothesis, since every argument for skepticism and every argument for certainty would be untestable. Surely some use of reason must remain indubitable. Next, says Schouls:

> ....unless one is blind to a glaring instance of question-begging, one would not be tempted to use reason in order to show that reason is reliable. One can, however, attempt to show the reliability of certain functions of reason....he cannot have held that every use of reason is untrustworthy.[67]

This is indeed a good reason why Schouls' interpretation makes sense. But if I am right in taking the above passage to mean Descartes would never have committed such a glaring error, then Schouls is being too kind. He is almost giving an ad hominem defense of Descartes.

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64. HR II: p. 38
65. Schouls, op. cit. p. 317
66. loc. cit.
67. loc. cit.

Just because Descartes was convinced he had provided an unshakable proof for the existence of God and was convinced he did not beg any questions in so doing, it does not mean that he succeeded. I refer the reader to Descartes' comment on the "reality content of an idea axiom" on page 28 above for an example of what sort of circularity passed unnoticed by him. This is not to say that I disagree with Schouls' assertion that it would not make sense for anyone to have committed such a blunder.

So, by holding and defending a case for a faculty of reason being indubitable (perhaps necessarily so)[68]--intuition$_1$--and assuming that "natural light" referred to in Descartes' Meditation III proofs for the existence of God is that (indubitable) faculty, Schouls shows a way we may free Descartes from the circularity charge. That is, specifically, the circularity charge made by Arnauld. (A circle may still exist elsewhere, as Schouls points out.)

This line of defense is very much in agreement with my own interpretation. However, this does not solve the further problem: The proofs for the existence of God contain axioms ("reality content of an idea" in one case, "first cause and continued existence" in the other) which are not prima facie sound, not tautologies. Thus the proofs, which are perhaps not circular, are still unsound.

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68. Necessarily so for reasons such as given by Schouls on the previous page. If no use of reason is trustworthy, we cannot reason. Since we are reasoning, we must be trusting some function of it.

Another interesting way out of the circle problem employing a heretofore unclaimed distinction in Descartes is by Fred Feldman, "Epistemic Appraisal and the Cartesian Circle".[69] The distinction made by Feldman is in levels of certainty dealt with by Descartes rather than in functions of reason. Descartes' attitude toward his investigation and argument in the first three Meditations was that it was a search for absolute, or metaphysical certainty (as I have mentioned before). The point to be noted carefully here is that there is evidence that Descartes thought a different kind, or a different degree of certainty was good enough for every day life and actions. The outcome of this distinction will eventually be that the axioms Descartes did not argue for were certain for him on a practical level. But Feldman is not claiming he did not have to argue for them. Rather, Feldman takes a slightly different course--he concentrates on reasons for doubt. Employing the metaphysical/practical certainty distinction, he asserts that any reason good enough to throw something into doubt (specifically, "All that I perceive clearly and distinctly is true") must be certain on a practical level. That is to say, there must be a proof for the reason for doubting, but not necessarily one that is completely justified, nor absolutely certain--merely practically certain. If on the other hand, the reason for doubt is not even practically possible, then it cannot be used at all.

69. Feldman, op. cit. Philosophical Studies Vol. 27, No. 1. Jan., 1975 p. 37.

Descartes' proof for the existence of God and proof for God not being an evil demon is explained in such a way by Feldman that it is seen as not circular--indeed it is given quite a bit of credibility. The proof for God as it stands is a practical certainty. Since it holds this status, it eliminates the one reason to doubt "All I perceive clearly and distinctly is true" (our desired conclusion in Meditation III). Therefore, the conclusion is left undoubted.

Feldman gives the following passage as an indication that Descartes made a distinction between practical certainty and metaphysical certainty.

> For I am assured that there can be neither peril or error in this course, [i.e. rejecting all opinions that are in any way doubtful] and that I cannot at present yield too much to distrust, since I am not considering the question of action, but only of knowledge.[70]

That Descartes claims in this passage not to have yielded too much to distrust indicates he thinks one can do so. Only when considering knowledge alone can one not hield too much to doubt. When considering action, however, the same sort of doubt could cause one to stop acting altogether--an undesirable consequence.[71] Further, it is shown in this passage that Descartes will employ

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70. HR I: p. 148

71. For example, if one has a slight doubt that his arm actually will go from point A to point B when he moves it, he may be justified in not moving it. Rejecting a whole action for some "slight doubt" would be yielding too much to doubt, but rejecting some proposition for "slight doubt" is not.

rigorous doubting only in considering knowledge qua knowledge. For action, reasons need not be so certain.

After offering more passages from Descartes which spread this practical/metaphysical distinction over knowledge, Feldman concludes:

> We can understand Descartes to be relying here on a distinction between two sorts of knowledge....Elsewhere he uses other terminology to mark the distinction, and I have chosen to call the former sort of knowledge "practical" and the latter "metaphysical".[72]

The point to make clear here is not the difference between reasons for action and reasons for knowledge and what is needed for either; but rather the amount of jusitification needed for a claim to be a practical certainty, and likewise the amount needed for a claim to be a metaphysical certainty. The defense of Descartes' arguments for the existence of God, and ultimately of his argument in defense of certainty lie in this area.

Practical certainty about a proposition is attained when a person is justified in believing the proposition. "Anyone who knows anything (in the ordinary sense of 'knows')[73] has practical certainty with respect to whatever it is he knows."[74] Metaphysical certainty is attained when a person is "maximally justified" in believing some proposition.[75] In Descartes' terms, "maximally justified" would mean "indubitable". (All the justification needed to conclude that some proposition is certain.) The cogito so far is all we are

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72. Feldman, op. cit. p. 39
73. I take the "ordinary sense of 'knows'" to be justified true belief. That is (x knows ϕ just in case x believes ϕ, x has justification for believing ϕ and ϕ happens to be true.)
74. Feldman, op. cit. p. 40
75. Feldman, op. cit. p. 43

"maximally justified" in being certain of.

There are certain relations between metaphysical and practical certainties that are necessary for us to understand in order to grasp Feldman's way out of the circle. Metaphysical certainties have to be practically certain. That is, what is maximally justified must at least be, simply, justified. (The opposite, that all practical certainties are metaphysical certainties, is not the case. All that is justified in some way is not necessarily justified maximally.) More importantly, doubt can be cast on a metaphysical certainty only if the reason for doubt is at least a practical possibility. A practical possibility need not be precisely defined in Feldman's terms, but the implications of this last requirement must be made clear.

Doubt can be cast on a metaphysical certainty, according to Descartes, only by well considered reasons--good reasons.

> ....Descartes says that reasons for doubt must be "powerful and maturely considered" and that doubt must be based upon "clear and assured reasonings".[76]

If some reason for doubt is based on something which is less than even a practical possibility, that means it has been based on something which is less-than-justified belief. Whatever a "less-than-justified-belief" is, we may be certain that a contradiction is one of them. Feldman will now show that Descartes' method of proof

76. Feldman, op. cit. p. 46 (HR I: 147-148 & HR I: p. 99)

is to make the reason for doubt, the evil demon, less than a practical possibility by making its opposite, God, a practical certainty. That will be the same as proving that ϕ is true (God is all good) and by so doing eliminating the possibility that $\sim\phi$ is true (God is not good).[77] And it will have the added effect of making the evil demon an ill-considered reason, no reason worthy of doubting that "All I clearly and distinctly perceive is true" is true. If there remains no reason to doubt this proposition, Descartes will have succeeded in proving it. It will have attained the level of metaphysical certainty, since it will be indubitable.

Feldman claims that the proof for the existenceof God is a proof on the practical level. But first of all, he points out that the proof is not as simple as Arnauld's comments would have us believe. The proof is not:

(1) Whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true
(2) I clearly and distinctly perceive God exists
(3) Therefore, God exists [78]

Rather, it employs the formal/objective reality content of an idea axiom and goes like this:

[A] (1) There exists an idea with infinite objective reality
(2) The cause of an existing idea must exist and must have at least as much formal reality as the idea has objective reality.
(3) God is, by definition, the being with infinite formal reality.
(4) Therefore, God exists [79]

77. We can see that this is exactly what Descartes does. See my page 30 above.
78. Feldman, op. cit.p. 51
79. loc. cit.

This rendition of the Third Meditation proof for the existence of God is quite similar to mine. To be noted for the sake of precision is that Arnauld's stated objection does not rightly confront the proof as stated by Descartes.

The next point made by Feldman is that the "formal-objective-reality-of-an-idea" axiom is a practical certainty for Descartes. His saying the "natural light" makes the axiom manifest is taken by Feldman to show Descartes took this to be a practical certainty, as well as all the other premises in the argument. We can assume that the whole proof then is a practical certainty for Descartes. If that is the case, then:

[B] (1) Whatever deceives is defective
(2) God is not defective (by definition)
(3) God does not deceive [80]

is a practical certainty as well. The evil demon's existence is a contradiction to [B] ; therefore it is not a practical possibility. It would be a less-than-justified belief since it would be in contradiction to a practical certainty. That "God is not a deceiver" makes the evil demon hypothesis a practical <u>impossibility</u>.

Explained in this way, claims Feldman, the procedure Descartes engaged in is comprehensible. Furthermore, his proof is not circular even "in spirit" since "manifest by the natural light" is a matter of practical knowledge and in a different realm from the final con-

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80. Feldman, <u>op. cit.</u> p. 52

clusion concerning metaphysical certainty of our knowledge. The only remaining problems are: the actual soundness of the overall argument, given it was only sound because the axioms were practically certain for Descartes; and the possibility of there being some other reason to doubt the desired conclusion. Feldman himself does not suggest another possible reason for doubt, and I cannot think of one; but it seems Descartes ought to have provided some argument to show that the evil demon hypothesis is the only reason to doubt the truth of our clear and distinct perceptions.

Notice that Feldman's reformulation of the arguments stated above (arguments labeled [A] and [B]) is not what clears Arnauld's objection. Rather it is a whole different explanation of what Descartes was about. Feldman has assumed, although never explicitly stated, that Descartes never doubted practical reason. The mere fact that terms like "natural light" and "clear and distinct perception" do not occur in Feldman's formulations of the arguments is not important. The whole arguments as they stand are taken to be in the realm of the never-doubted practical reason.

If it were the case that Arnauld objected to Descartes because he took the argument for the existence of God to be the one given on page 42, then Feldman's article is an indisputable refutation of arnauld because the term 'clearly and distinctly perceive' is not employed in the actual argument by Descartes. If, on the other hand, Arnauld objected to Descartes' apparent doubt of all kinds of reason,

then Feldman provides an interesting explanation,[81] one that seems correct.

The last article I shall discuss in connection with this matter is Gewirth's, "The Cartesian Circle Reconsidered".[82] Gewirth breaks out of the circle problem in a way similar to Feldman--that is, he shows the evil demon hypothesis does not provide a good enough (a "valid and meditated") reason to doubt clear and distinct perception. In this case, the flaw with the evil demon hypothesis is that it is incoherent and thus not a good reason to doubt.

Given that Descartes does throw clear and distinct perceptions into doubt *via* the evil demon in *Meditation III*, what needs to be done (as has been done in the previous two articles) is to "grapple with the lion", doubt of clear and distinct perception itself.[83]

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81. Just as Schouls holds that Descartes never doubted "natural light", Feldman holds Descartes never doubted practical knowledge--only metaphysical knowledge.

82. Gewirth, *op. cit.* *Journal of Philosophy.* 1970

83. The first part of Gewirth's article is aimed at defending this interpretation of the *Meditation III* arguments against those who hold the "memory thesis". The memory thesis, stated simply, is that there is no circle in the *Third Meditation* because Descartes never doubted the truth of clear and distinct perception; rather, he doubted the memory of what was clearly and distinctly perceived. If clear and distinct perception was never doubted, then it can be used in the argument to prove the existence of God. If it can be used in the argument, then Arnauld's objection does not hold. Adherents of the memory thesis include: Willis Doney, "The Cartesian Circle". *Journal of the History of Ideas.* Vol XVI, 1955; A.K. Stout, "The Basis of Knowledge in Descartes". In: Doney (ed) *Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays.* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967) (Cf. p. 147 ff) and L. Miller, "Descartes, Mathematics and God". Sasonke & Fleming, *Meta-Meditations.* (California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1966)

Using the example of Descartes' doubt of mathematical propositions as doubt of clear and distinct perceptions in general; Gewirth points out that what is doubted is not that mathematical propositions are clear and distinct (i.e. that clear and distinct propositions are clear and distinct), but rather that they are true. This interpretation should come as no surprise at this point. My initial explication of the Third Meditation argument does not differ from this interpretation at all. Gewirth only makes it clear that truth of clear and distinct propositions is different from clearness and distinctness of clear and distinct propositions because he intends to use this distinction in the following way: The basis for a reason's being a good reason for doubt will be the reason's being clear and distinct. It is necessary to point out that Descartes never doubts what it is that makes a proposition clear and distinct; for if he did doubt that, we would have him involved again in another circle.

Let me quote the important passage from Gewirth:

> ....But metaphysical doubt which bears on truth, is concerned with external considerations. It questions whether "things are in truth just as we perceive them" that is whether the clear and distinct ideas which are the result of the mind's inner workings at their best are in conformity with the objects the ideas purport to represent.[84]

That is to say, Descartes doubts that what is clear and distinct is true; but never doubts that what is clear and distinct is clear and distinct, nor what is not clear and distinct isnot clear and distinct. So he can use clearness and distinctness even in the argument concerning

84. Gewirth, op. cit. pp. 675-676

doubt of the truth of clear and distinct ideas.

Before I go on with "The Cartesian Circle Reconsidered", it is necessary at this point to delve into Gewirth's rather complicated interpretation of clear and distinct ideas.[85] The best way to do this is to explain only that which need be explained to understand the issue at hand. To do so, it will not be misleading to liken an 'idea' to a unit. This unit has an inner structure, and the idea also connects in certain ways to things outside itself.

A clear and distinct perception is an idea (a unit) whose inner connections are understood by the perceiver. The inner structure is understood. Any idea whose inner structure contains contradictions or confusions of some sort or another is not a clearly and distinctly perceived idea--it cannot be clearly and distinctly understood by anyone. If the idea corresponds to something in reality--that is to say, if it connects with something outside itself by being like it--then we call it a true idea. It is considerations about correspondence that we call truth (formal truth). These considerations are called "external considerations" by Gewirth. This is what we are interested in proving in Meditation III. Considerations about inner structure (called "internal considerations" by Gewirth) are considerations about "material" truth of an idea, or merely clarity and distinctness of the idea itself.

The evil demon is the reason why we have metaphysical doubt (doubt that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is "formally"

85. Cf. Gewirth, "Clarity and Distinctness in Descartes", Doney (ed) Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays.(New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967)

true). As mentioned before, reasons for doubt have to be good reasons, "valid and meditated" reasons. Now the only criterion for a reason's being "valid and meditated" that can be used here by Descartes must be internal criterion, and this must be whether the inner structure of the idea is perceivable in a clear and distinct fashion. As I mentioned before, the external criterion of validity--whether the idea corresponds to reality or not--is precisely what is in question. Descartes cannot be using it to decide if the reason for doubt, the evil demon hypothesis, is "valid and meditated". That would be tantamount to saying all of my clear and distinct ideas correspond to reality unless my idea of an evil demon corresponds to reality, while trying to discover whether there is any reality. Descartes cannot be using the external criterion without engaging in circular reasoning.

On "internal grounds" then, in order for the evil demon to be a valid reason, the concept of "evil demon" must be clear and distinct. Far from being clear and distinct, however, the notion of an all-powerful yet deceiving being is contradictory (as mentioned before). It is a confused, incomprehensible notion, and thus cannot provide a good reason to doubt anything. And, cannot provide a good reason to doubt that our clear and distinct ideas are true. (If, as Feldman pointed out, there is some other reason to doubt clear and distinct ideas being true, this proof of Gewirth's does not accomplish what he intends; for it only works if the evil demon is the only good reason to doubt.)

A certain elegance is possible under Gewirth's interpretation, although I doubt if he intended it. If he is right about only those ideas which are clear and distinct being used as reasons; and if "clear and distinct" is some sort of consistency within an idea or within a proposition (or set of propositions); then Descartes need not prove God exists at all. He merely needs to show that any deceiver on this scale would need to be omnipotent and deception is contrary to omnipotence. The only assumptions used by Descartes would then be the truth of the law of contradiction and the standard definition of God. Refuting those assumptions would be more difficult than refuting the ontological argument--and that is no easy task.

In short, Descartes would need only to show in Meditation III the following proposition: "If God exists at all, he is no deceiver"; rather than the stronger one: "God exists and he is no deceiver." Unfortunately, Descartes chose the latter more difficult one to prove.

Each one of these very good "circle-breakers" leaves a problem with regard to the guarantee of certainty: With Schouls, the problem is that there is still no defense for the premises used in the proof of God. With Feldman, there is that problem plus the other problem he brings out: that other reasons for doubting the truth of all we clearly and distinctly perceive are not dealt with and eliminated by Descartes. Gewirth, by not referring specifically to the arguments for the existence of God does not get out the above two problems,

although he does explain away the circle. Furthermore, his elegant proof that the evil demon hypothesis is not a good enough reason to doubt, relies on Descartes' assumption of the law of contradiction, which is problematic.[86] We are still left with a circle here, but a different one.

This detailed investigation of the argument's failure has indeed shown that there are solutions to Arnauld's charge of invalidity or

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86. To make this point more clearly: Evil is in contradiction to the greatest of all possible beings. I have hinted at Descartes' use of the law of contradiction, but never discussed it. Kenny ("The Cartesian Circle and the Eternal Truths". Journal of Philosophy. 1970.) objects to Descartes' use of this law. He brings out that Gewirth's dissolution of the validity of the evil demon hypothesis relies on an assumption of the truth of the law of contradiction (as I have said), and he does not think Descartes is justified in using this law. He even wonders if Descartes did use it. There is evidence that Descartes did rely on this very law:

> For as regards general principles and axioms--for example, it is impossible that the same thing should both be and not be--men limited to the sense, as we all are before [we encounter] philosophy, do not consider or attend to them. But since [these principles and axioms] are, clearly, innate and experienced inwardly, [such men] neglect them;.... For if men did consider them in the latter way, [non-confused] no one would have any doubts about them. (ATV 146, Charles Adam (ed.) Entretien avec Burman. (Paris: Boiven, 1937) p.3-5)

This passage gives evidence that Descartes did rely on the law of contradiction, but it also gives evidence that he never doubted it. There are two things to be said about that: First, if he never doubted it, it is not circular to use it, and second (more importantly) no reasonable enterprise can be engaged in if we deny every single rule of inference and every single law (see Schouls above, page 36). Kenny has fallen into the trap of skepticism. He does not know what can be relied on, having once started to doubt.

circularity in Descartes' argument for certainty. However, the question of soundness still remains, and given the nature of the enquiry, cannot be overlooked.

CHAPTER V

FAILURE OF THE CRITERIA OF CERTAINTY

It is tempting to ask why Descartes ever introduced the evil demon in the first place. After all, it seems that his argument's troubles started with proofs for the existence of God and those proofs were only to show that there was no evil demon. To answer this question, I must digress a little and stress the importance to Descartes of a correspondence theory of truth. A correspondence theory of truth is one where what is true is what corresponds to reality. As Leibnitz put it: Truth is "correspondence of the things in the mind with the things in question."[87] Descartes would put it: "Correspondence of our ideas with reality."

As one reads the beginning of Meditation III, one finds the problem to which Descartes addresses himself clearly stated. All he knows at the outset is the things "which reside in him", and he wishes in this meditation to "extend his knowledge further".[88] Stating what we have discovered in the previous two meditatations:

> ....I thought I perceived very clearly, although in truth I did not perceive it at all, to wit, that there were objects outside of me from which these ideas proceeded and to which they were entirely similar.[89]

He reminds us that there is some doubt concerning the perception of these objects outside himself which he intends to clear up in this

87. Leibnitz, New Essays. (La Salle: Open Court Pub. Inc., 1949) Bk. IV Ch. V
88. HR I: p. 157
89. HR I: p. 158

meditation. He intends to show it indubitable that what he perceives very clearly as existing outside himself does exist outside himself, and is entirely similar to his perception (insofar as it is clear and distinct). A clearer statement of reliance on a correspondence theory of truth could not be made.

Having established the importance of correspondence to Descartes, I need only repeat the function of the evil demon to make it evident why Descartes introduced him. The evil demon is the being powerful enough to make it be the case that "there is no earth, no heaven, no extended body, no magnitude, no place, and that nevertheless [I possess] the perceptions of all these things and that they seem to me to exist just exactly as I now see them."[90] The evil demon is Descartes' doubting device for all of reality, or rather, the reason he gives why we might doubt the existence of all extra-mental reality. Given his frist rule, to doubt everything, he had to introduce this device to test his conclusion. (This device or some such doubt of reality.)

Quite apart from all these considerations, would Descartes' argument, given its reliance on correspondence, have worked if he had not introduced the evil demon? If his "general rule" from Meditation III, "....all things which I perceive very clearly and distinctly are true."[91] had never been attacked by the evil demon and if it had read exactly as I have just stated it, would he have been able to argue successfully for certainty?

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90. HRI: p. 147
91. HRI: p. 158

I wish to explore this possibility for two reasons. The first and most important reason is that the "general rule" statement I quoted above makes it seem that the criterion for certainty is clear and distinct perception. This exploration will expose the criterion of clear and distince perception as insufficient for truth according to Descartes' position in the Meditations, and thus not sufficient criterion for certainty. It is perhaps sufficient for propositions not involving "things outside oneself", but not sufficient for the rest, as I shall expose shortly. The next reason for going into this is the subsidiary one of wanting to try every solution to Descartes' difficulties that I can think of, so I may rightly conclude at the end of this thesis that he has failed in his argument for certainty.

The statement under investigation, "....all things which I perceive very clearly and distinctly are true", can be understood in two ways: 1) It can be taken as a definition; 'is true' means "all that which I perceive very clearly and distinctly". 2) It can be taken as a criterion statement; the conditions under which I conclude that something is "true" are that I have perceived it very clearly and distinctly.

If it is taken in the first way (the definitional statement), then we can dismiss it very quickly. It has very little credibility as a general rule for certainty, for it seems to make what is true co-extensive with what "I clearly and distinctly perceive." This sort of interpretation violates what has gone before by making what

Descartes rejected in Meditation I no longer subject to rejection. If truth = (def) all that I very clearly and distinctly perceive, then all of what is true is identical to my own clear and distinct perceptions. What is more, my thinking I have clearly and distinctly perceived something would be sufficient, for there is no further condition placed on the statement outside of the "I" having accomplished this task. If my thinking I have done this is enough for its being true, then my thinking I have done this is enough for me to be certain of it. Now Descartes has already seen fit to reject things he thought he clearly and distinctly perceived in Meditation I--and has reiterated this position in Meditation III (see page 52 above). It would seem then that we no longer have cause to consider this reading as a possible interpretation. We could not have argued from this interpretation of his general rule to certainty in his terms, for it violates his whole position on certainty.

If the "general rule" is read in the second way (as a criterion statement) it is not blatantly unacceptable as a basis for his argument for certainty. In fact it has quite a bit of credibility when explained in a certain way. However, we will see it is still unacceptable. First let me explain what is credible about this interpretation. In order to do so, and to distinguish it clearly from the former statement, let me restate it. I am taking it to mean "Since I can clearly and distinctly perceive something, I conclude it is true." Clearly and distinctly perceiving becomes

the complete criterion for application of the judgment "ϕ is true" to some idea or proposition, ϕ.

The discussion that will show this statement is possibly a correct interpretation of Descartes' original statement is an extension of the discussion I gave of Gewirth on pages 49 and 50 above. We ended the discussion after pointing out that his interpretation allows some ideas to be capable of clear and distinct perception and some ideas not capable of it. In the context of the evil demon, we saw he could not serve as a reason for doubt because the idea fell into the latter category. Since it is confused, obscure and even contradictory, it could never be clearly and distinctly understood. Thus it could not provide a good reason to doubt.

We could extend this discussion and claim that the evil demon idea is <u>false</u> because it cannot be clearly and distinctly perceived.[92] What comes next is the claim that <u>true</u> ideas are ones that can be clearly and distinctly perceived. Going one step further with this interpretation, we can say that the criterion statement we have been talking about is a claim that all ideas which <u>can</u> be clearly and distinctly perceived are true.

Now we have come to the problem. Being able to clearly and distinctly perceive an idea under Gewirth's interpretation means one has found the idea <u>coherent</u>. If clear and distinct perception is the total criterion for truth, that is tantamount to claiming coherence

92. Not only could we say it, it has been said by Descartes himself. (Cf. Gewirth, "Clarity and Distinctness in Descartes." Doney, W. (ed) <u>Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays</u>. (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967))

is a sufficient criterion for me to conclude some idea is true. But even without expressly stating the terms, 'correspondence with reality', the meaning of 'true' in Descartes' work must call us to reject this second reading of the "general rule". Truth involves a class of our perceptions being "entirely similar" to reality, and that is an added requirement that coherence of the idea by itself cannot fulfill.

Furthermore, even if clearly and distinctly perceiving an idea were to provide a complete criterion for a theory of truth, it would not make explicit other requirements of a coherence theory of truth. These other requirements at least include that all of my true ideas be coherent with one another. Clear and distinct perception does not say anything about my ideas in relation to one another. But supposing it did, and supposing that that gave us a sufficient criterion for a coherence theory of truth, we must still rule it out for Descartes. All of my ideas being consistent with one another, while perhaps not corresponding to extra-mental reality, would not satisfy Descartes' theory of truth. I offer as proof his description of the evil of the evil demon. Reading over the passage, we see that evil is in making it seem all of our ideas (which are consistent with one another, believable, and coherent) are true, when in fact they are not because they do not correspond to any <u>reality</u>. If all my ideas being consistent with one another can still be evil, Descartes cannot hold a coherence theory of truth.

We have tried to avoid the evil demon problem and have concentrated

on things that seemed correct in Descartes' argument. Everything seemed to work until we reached the evil demon problem so we have investigated it to see if the argument would have worked with no evil demon. This is tantamount to asking whether clear and distinct perception alone could have served to make us certain. Our conclusion is that it would not have yielded certainty about extra-mental reality; and since that was Descartes' stated aim, we conclude the argument would not have worked at all.

By this time it is becoming apparent that Descartes' problem may not have been the evil demon, but rather his aim--certainty with a correspondence theory of truth. Descartes or no Descartes, a correspondence theory of truth has problems whenever it is applied rigorously. It always leaves us room for doubt.[93] By "applying correspondence rigorously" I mean using it as both a definition of truth and a criterion of truth. This amounts to saying both: 1) 'truth' <u>means</u> the idea corresponds to reality (is "entirely similar") and 2) I know to apply the word 'true' to an idea when the idea corresponds to reality.

As Rescher points out, if we make a statement like 2) above, we are as much as saying we can take a look at REALITY and take a look at our idea and see that they are "entirely similar". In Descartes where all we know is our ideas,[94] this would be impossible. We could

93. The following discussion draws on general ideas presented in the introductory chapter of Rescher, <u>The Coherence Theory of Truth</u>. (Oxford: University Press, 1973)

94. "We can have no knowledge of things otherwise than through the ideas we conceive of them" Letter to Gibieuf, Adam-Tannery, <u>Oeuvres de Descartes</u>. (Paris: Leopold Cerf., 1897-1913) Vol III, p. 476 Quoted by Gewirth ("Clearness & Distinctness in Descartes" <u>op. cit.</u> p. 254)

never get outside both reality and ideas to "take a look" at all--yet Descartes adheres to this theory.

Descartes aside, certain claims cannot be verified using the correspondence criterion even if we skirted the point about only perceiving ideas. Two such claims are universal claims and past claims. To verify a universal claim, e.g. "All human beings do ϕ", we would have to be able to see all the human beings there are and see whether or not they do ϕ. Since this is impossible, correspondence cannot serve as the criterion for truth of such claims. Likewise with past claims, e.g. "Mark Twain did ϕ", we would have to look into the past to see if the reality corresponded to our idea. This is also impossible. No theory of truth can have correspondence alone as the criterion for truth. One wants one's criterion to match one's definition. If truth <u>means</u> correspondence with reality, recognizing when something is true should involve recognizing that something has corresponded with reality. In fact it would seem using one thing as a definition of truth and another for criterion of truth would be inconsistent. If truth means correspondence with reality, and recognizing when something is true involves (e.g.) coherence of the idea; then the notion of truth becomes inconsistent. One would mean by 'truth' one thing, but recognize it by another. That essentially is the problem with a correspondence theory of truth. It either leaves the rigorous adherent room for doubt, or forces the half-hearted adherent into inconsistency.

The problem with Descartes' having adhered to a correspondence theory comes with his search for absolute certainty. As long as

there is some room to doubt the truth of a proposition, there is some room to be uncertain about it. Since one is always uncertain to some degree about propositions in a correspondence theory of truth, Descartes having chosen this theory has doomed himself to failure. A passage from Meditation VI where Descartes considers the necessary existence of 'body' apart from considering whether or not God exists, shows his predicament well:

> ....I conjecture with probability that body does exist; but this is only with probability, and although I examine all things with care, I nevertheless do not find that from this distinct idea of corporeal nature, which I have in my imagination, I can derive any argument from which there will necessarily be deduced the existence of body.[95]

Because of the inability to recognize when some idea has corresponded to reality under Descartes' theory, we need some assurance outside our own perception that various of our ideas are true. Here is where the evil demon comes in. Earlier in this chapter I explained one reason why Descartes introduced him, now we can see another reason. He was a vehicle for absolute certainty in this particular theory. If Descartes could have successfully eliminated the possibility of his existence, there would have been no reason to doubt the correspondence of our ideas to reality.[96] The theory fraught with room for doubt would have had no more room for doubt.

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95. HR I: p. 187

96. Provided what I pointed out earlier was the case: namely that there is only one reason to doubt reality, and that that one reason is the evil demon.

I have shown what problems there were with the argument for certainty and attempted solutions to all of them and even attempted solutions which ignored the problem areas. STill, the argument for certainty fails. What is more, I hope to have provided in this chapter a basis for claiming the whole argument was doomed to failure from the outset as long as Descartes adhered to a correspondence theory of truth, and as long as his criterion for certainty was clear and distinct perception.

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